

# THE MEASURE

## A JOURNAL OF POETRY



Poems by Countée Cullen, Lena Hall, Margaret  
Larkin, Edward Sapir and Others — — — — —

“Spring Thunder” Reviewed — — — — —

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# The Measure

*A Journal of Poetry*

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## Hunger

**B**REAK me no bread however white it be;  
It cannot fill the emptiness I know;  
No wine can cool this desert thirst in me,  
Though it had lain a thousand years in snow;  
No swooning lotus flower's languid juice  
Drips anodyne unto my restlessness,  
And impotent to win me to a truce  
Is every artifice of loveliness.

Inevitable is the way I go,  
False-faced amid a pageant permeate  
With bliss, yet visioning a higher wave  
Than this weak ripple washing to and fro;  
The fool still keeps his dreams inviolate  
Till their virginity espouse the grave.

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# Colors

## RED

SHE went to buy a brand new hat,  
And she was ugly, black, and fat.  
"This red becomes you well," they said,  
And perched it high upon her head;  
And then they laughed behind her back  
To see it glow against the black;  
She payed for it with regal mien,  
And walked out proud as any queen.

## BLACK

1

THE play is done; the crowds depart; and see,  
That twisted tortured thing hung from a tree,  
Swart victim of a newer Calvary.

2

Yea, he who helped Christ up Golgotha's track,  
That Simon who did *not* deny, was black.

## THE UNKNOWN COLOR

I'VE often heard my mother say,  
When great winds blew across the day,  
And, cuddled close and out of sight,  
The young pigs squealed with sudden fright  
Like something speared or javelined,  
"Poor little pigs, they see the wind."



## The Spark

“STAMP hard; be sure  
We leave no spark

That may allure  
This placid dark.  
At last we learn  
That love is cruel;  
Fire will not burn  
Lacking fuel.

Here, take your heart,  
The whole of it,  
I want no part,  
No smallest bit.  
And this is mine?  
You took scant care;  
My heart could shine;  
No glaze was there.

Young lips hold wine  
The fair world over;  
New heads near mine  
Will dent the clover;  
We need not pine  
Now this is over.

Now love is dead,  
We might be friends;  
'Tis best instead  
To say all ends.  
And when we meet,  
Pass quickly by;  
Oh, speed your feet,  
And so will I . . . .  
I knew a man  
Thought a spark was dead  
That flamed and ran  
A brighter red,  
And burned the roof  
Above his head.

*Countée Cullen*

## Answer

**H**AD I been one of those proud lilies  
When he said "Consider,"  
I would have shot up to a star, quick with red!

Or had I been a small loaf near a dazed multitude,  
I would have widened with laughter's leaven  
Till the grass was fed!

But if I had been thorns in that crown,  
I would have shrunk with shame  
Till a tree died alone, without a name.

## Himself

**H**E was not modeled by a pattern set  
With hand restrained upon the ordered years.  
Ten standard asters hurt his eyes. His ears  
Were pained by major thirds. He could forget,—  
Swift as a young June drops the violet,—  
That sea of waving white, trumpeting cheers,  
Honor that scales a height and disappears  
Before the early fields lie cool and wet.

His path lay out of line. An unclassed flower,  
Sole of its kind upon a perilous crag,  
His language knew; and hour by patient hour,  
Loosing the molded forms that dull and drag,  
He built a place, nor cared that his strange tower  
Drew hound and archer like a sharpened stag.

*Lena Hall*

## Words to be Graven on Sandstone

**N**OT with a snarl of bronze and a crackle of drums,  
Not as a clean blade clips a cord asunder,  
Never in such a forthright guise death comes  
To quench the flame and plough the compost under.  
Not so. We die in ways obscure and little.  
I am less man this hour than yesterday;  
More than I shall be soon. The slow years whittle,  
With rusty knives, body and brain away.

Some day above these bones, a granite lie,  
My unimportant name may stand in stone.  
Fools, I have died these decades past, and I  
Am ash in tombs unnumbered and unknown,  
Spoil of the seas, prey to the wind's dissection,  
Scattered too far for any resurrection.

*Ted Olson*

## Epitaph for Lovers

**T**HEY do not gaze at suns  
Who sleep beneath the ground;  
A vine creeps on his mound  
Where her fond hand was once.

*Charles Norman*

## Duel by Lamplight

THE contours of a courteous lie  
Dissolve before her level look,  
He has no rule to gauge her by,  
(She's not a person in a book).

Would you be worthy of my trust,  
(Her calm demeanor indicates),  
Why do you wriggle in the dust?  
Men love me by no devious hates.

Mine is no chastity to be  
Affrighted by your naked words,  
Old prejudices thrive in me  
Enamored of the sound of swords.

Put by this mask of suave deceit,  
Artifice ill becomes your face,  
Refrain from worshipping my feet  
And woo me with a warm embrace.

Too late. His courage cannot rise  
But nurses visionary wings.  
Evading her attentive eyes  
He speaks of other things.

## Commentator

BRING the chapter to a close:  
Time would whet  
One by one his yellow teeth  
On the labor you bequeath  
And would fret  
Pages you cannot forget  
To a blasted rose.  
Soon will come the day  
None may read  
In the tortured text thereof  
What was your consuming love.  
Even though the fingers bleed  
Wherewith you sow the seed,  
Time filches it away.

*Bernard Raymund*



## Platonic

**Y**OU are to me no deeper than a friend.  
Together through the purpling streets we stroll  
And speak things intellectual in droll,  
Sophisticated fashion. You can send  
Your voice's cutting puissance to my brain  
And there corrode an everlasting groove;  
But never does your ardent body move  
To swamp my senses like a sweeping rain.

We find the hand a useful instrument  
For greeting and farewell: we are no prey  
To maudlin throbbing or romance; we say  
Such things are for the folk of trivial bent.  
And when we separate, not your wild hair  
Pursues me, but your maxim on despair.

## Puck

**Y**OU catapult a ceaseless fusillade  
Of darting witty phrases, lately culled;  
Unmindful of your audience, undismayed  
By cold reception, you are never dulled  
To silence, but go lightly, quickly on,  
As if you felt it requisite to play  
The cosmic entertainer . . . . Never wan,  
You flaunt your ruddy countenance each day.

Do you pass all your nights within a room  
Assorting jests within you, and composing  
New mirth wherewith to banish earthly gloom?  
O tireless fellow, are you never dozing?  
You are as reprehensible as those  
Who spend their days concocting further woes.

*Emanuel Eisenberg*

## Over a Dead Poet

**T**HERE was in him no factual trace of sin,  
Here was a child, a subtly wayward one at that,  
Lacking all sense of appropriate discipline,  
Loving color and contour, despising the dull, the flat.

If he were forced at times to be cruelly clever,  
He wrapped his sword-point in lint lest blood fall on the ground,  
He was both too strong and too weak completely to sever  
Evil from good, he was too versatile to be profound.

He never wore dirty collars by choice nor adopted loud socks,  
He loathed the arid sham, the melancholy middle-class tie,  
Here was no daring aphorism, no disturbing paradox,  
R. I. P. Life did rather well in letting him die.

*Paul Tanaquil*

## Music

“**W**HAT is our life?” profoundly gesturing,  
“Let us forget!” they said, unanimous.—  
The strings are the most chastely amorous  
Of dreamers, 'tis the watery flutes that sing  
Of the lily-footed girls, the oboes bring  
The mountain sleep to the voluptuous,  
Romancing horns. Round this oblivious  
Desire drums threaten and the trumpets ring.

Who are these forty gentlemen of toys,  
Graver than dolls, graver than pirate boys?  
Who are these shining gentlemen of brief  
Commotion? What is their intense belief?—  
“Now what is life?” Take then the dream of joys!  
“Let us forget!” Take but the lilt of grief!

## For One a Little Awkward of Speech

**G**IVE ear to the unfinished word  
If you would guess his finished house,  
So rich that for the nesting bird  
He treasures, and the unseen mouse.

His hospitality is wise,  
A harmless liar on the tongue;  
Somewhere in hiding in the eyes,  
It will not hear long praises sung.  
His voice will teach you and the slow  
Enkindling silences. His speech  
Is only a random throw,  
Salute and welcome from the breach.

*Edward Sapir*

## Poem

**H**OW can it be that I should love you still,  
In moments swift and unquestioning as before?  
Love begins with nothing and ends with nothing  
And is no more.

With my new love I have found the beginning of beauty,  
And for my passionate heart a quiet, shut place,  
Yet when he comes in dreams and I look at him dreaming,  
I see your face!

*Margaret Larkin*



## Cantrip

**S**COOP a crescent in your side  
Beckon her to come;  
I will nestle in the wide  
Hollow of your thumb.

She will bring you gold and land,  
Dulia and youth;  
I will surely bite your hand  
With a wicked tooth.

Round your heart her heart will twine  
—I am much too clever—  
You will worship at my shrine  
Forever and forever.

*Margaret Tod Ritter*

## Silence

**I** HAVE lain in the dark  
And listened  
To the thin, high shrilling  
Of blood in the veins of my ears,  
And I have wondered  
What pure silence is.

Sometime I shall know pure silence  
And clean sound,  
Not blurred by the clamor of my own flesh. . . .  
Shall I know how to bear it?

*Sibyl Croly Hanchett*

## Toward Thaw

HOW shall we bear it if snow-flattened grass  
Lift its watery points out of the sod;  
If the slim crocus, pushing through clouded glass,  
Break petalled color from its delicate rod?  
What shall we hurt ones do for breath, having held,  
Knotted against the throat, a threaded net  
Of cold, unhappy air that never smelled  
Of the good ground from which roots suck their wet?  
O may the sun but slowly elevate  
Its arc to April's height, and slowly draw  
The winter-stiffened heart to its new state  
For fear of flood that follows too quick thaw.

*H. A. Farman*

# The Measure & A Journal of Poetry

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*Associate Editors—Hervey Allen, Maxwell Anderson, and Frank Ernest Hill.*

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ACTING EDITOR: LOUISE BOGAN

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## Spring Thunder

*Spring Thunder and Other Poems. By Mark Van Doren; Thomas Seltzer; 1924*

The title poem of this first book of verses initiates an atmosphere of classic restraint in subject and imagery which is persistent throughout the book, moulding the whole into a solidarity which will be either languorously satisfying or egregiously monotonous, according to the reader's apperceptive mood. Fortunately, we opened the volume at a time when relaxation was imperative; on the first page we were soothed to "hear the edge of winter crumble" in *Spring Thunder*; and we were able to extend our sense of gratitude to the end.

In a day when everyone is solving a problem or grinding the *clichéd* axe, Mr. Van Doren shuns the general tumult for reflection on things generally esteemed of slight interest in themselves—simple people, pleasant places, the flirtatious weather, and the shy, sensitive animal world. This poet is happiest when he is painting a picture, and his finished product is generally arresting, while never startling or over-drawn. One can almost see the blue pencil deleting any spry expression which might be trembling on the verge of an Olympian ecstacy.

Mr. Van Doren is essentially a lyricist, and his short, singing verses like *Immortal*, *Alfalfa Coming*, and *Noblesse* (which comes

perilously near being jaunty despite Mr. Van Doren's wary hand) quite overshadow his more ambitious creations in blank verse. In fact, these latter are somewhat annoying and paradoxically inconsistent with the poet's manifest precision; for they insist upon frequent excursions off meter. Blank verse may present difficulties of organization and sound, but it is the easiest matter in meterdom to stress it correctly. One has only to count on his fingers, and, in a pinch, to juggle his inversions. Mr. Van Doren, to his credit, seems deliberately to eschew inversions, so we must put his defection down to carelessness. And that is no slight indictment; for if carelessness is unpardonable in blank verse, it is especially so when evinced in an otherwise perfect lyric like *Noblesse*, the second stanza of which, beginning:

Weeds, arriving everywhere,  
Are insolent as soon as come,

calls for repeated perusal before the light breaks, a serious detracting from lyric value, The last stanza is perfect, telling

How blue-grass is the gentlest born  
Of all the gentle things that stand,  
Holding, without a spear or thorn,  
Hereditary land.

Those of us who mourn the passing of the brownies and fairies need lament no longer. We need but read Mr. Van Doren's *To a Child With Eyes* (a poem as magical as the child verses of Walter de la Mare; yet exclusive enough enough not to be specifically reminiscent of him) to find that all mystery has not fled with the fays. Although

The commonwealth is gone that shut  
Its felons in a hazel-nut,

Mr. Van Doren delightfully and simply explains that much still remains to be seen:

There is the squirrel. There is the bee.  
There is the chipmunk on the wall,  
And the first yellow every fall.  
There is the humming-bird, the crow.  
There is the lantern on the snow.  
There is the new-appearing corn.  
There is the cold a minute born . . .  
Run and see, and say how many—  
There are more if there is any.



It is a rare first book of poems which doesn't devote half its pages to lauding or defaming the blind bow-boy. *Spring Thunder* is such a rarity. The oldest theme in the world is almost entirely ignored by Mr. Van Doren. Yet, *Alteration*, one of the poems which has insisted upon staying with us, seems to be a splendid symbolism of the end of love. It may be that we are reading too much into a poems which means no more than it says, but if we divest the lines of their suggestiveness, little remains to commend them. If symbolic, the poem is fine enough to quote in its entirety.

#### ALTERATION

I did not ask to have the shed  
Pulled down, although it leaned so sickly.  
But, now the proper word is said,  
Let it come quickly.

Bring rope and pulley, axe and bar,  
And while you hammer I will pry.  
Shingles can be sent as far  
As feathers fly.

Naked beams can tumble faster  
Than cobwebs in a sudden gust;  
Floors can stand on end; and plaster  
Soon is dust.

I did not think this valley-view  
Deserved that any roof should fall.  
But, now the word is said by you,  
I want it all.

Mr. Van Doern's volume is not noisy, but its echo lingers in the inner self after the slight reverberations have ceased. One coming to this book in need of calm and quiet will find much to meet his approval, and nothing at all for unqualified censure.

*Countée Cullen*



## Contributors

COUNTEE CULLEN writes of himself that he is a New Yorker, colored, a student at New York University, and that for two years he has won second prize in the Witter Bynner undergraduate poetry contest. His long poem, "The Shroud of Color," in a recent number of *The American Mercury*, attracted much attention.

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# The Measure

*A Journal of Poetry*

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